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Aristophanes' Criticism of Euripides

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ARISTOPHANES' CRITICISM OF EURIPIDES

by

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LIFE

Matthew Eugene Creighton, S.J., was born at Chicago, Illinois, February 8, 1927.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Aristophanes the man is, without doubt, one of the most controverted figures in the history of Greek literature. Criticized beyond measure for the licentiousness and crude incidental humor of his plays he is, at the same time, praised for his literary insight and brilliant satirical wit.[1]

Both opinions find justification in his works. Both fail, nevertheless, adequately to characterize the man. They fail to take into account the vehement yet well-moderated passion for the glory that was Greece which stimulated him in his herculean effort to purge Athens of those forces which, were they left unchecked, would inevitably work its complete destruction.

This passion, when assumed as a postulate by the classical scholar, brings new and profound depth into his understanding of Aristophanes' plays. Much that was hitherto vague and purpose-

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1 A. Petrie, Greek History: Antiquities and Literature London, 1947, 151.

less in them assumes a character that was previously unsuspected. The true genius of Aristophanes, not merely as a wit and a critic but also as a penetrating analyst of historical trends and their consequences, comes to light under such a supposition and the path to a more accurate understanding of the man is opened. The structure of our thesis rests in large part on this supposition.

From an historical point of view the most important of Aristophanes' works which have come down to us are those in which he voiced his most bitter attacks against a new and disconcerting enemy which was infiltrating every phase of Athenian life. He criticized the bickerings of the Sophists in the Clouds because he realized that their unstable philosophical spirit was undermining the moral fiber of civic and military obedience.[2] He attacked the malpractice of the political demagogue in the Peace.[3] He directed the full force of his talent against the rising tide of pseudo-humanism in the Frogs.[4]

These were not disparate attacks or mere fortuitous offensives against unrelated enemies. They were onslaughts in a

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2 Maurice Croiset, Aristophanes and the Political Parties at Athens, London, 1909, 154.

3 Benjamin B. Rogers, Aristophanes, London, 1924, II, 2.

4 Alfred Croiset, Aristophane et L'Ancienne Comedie Attique, 3rd, Paris, 1902, 338.

single, well-defined campaign against an immature and perilous rationalism and the uncertitudes left in its wake.[5] The peculiar genius of Aristophanes lies in the fact that he foresaw where this spirit of inquiry was leading: to mass agnosticism, the certain result of which would be a loss of stability in the struggle of Athens to survive as a leading power. People do not fight perseveringly without ideals that are dearly loved; they do not fight bravely when they are given to the disgusting effeminacy of a decadent stage; they do not fight effectively for a common advantage when they lack the direction which can be imposed only by unquestioning obedience to leaders who have their complete trust.

Aristophanes was not a philosophic genius. He did not know the answers to the questions the philosophers were proposing. He only saw the harm their men were doing. He made his appeal to the ideals of the past because they seemed to him the only secure refuge in time of crisis. He felt that these ideals had been effective in the perils of other years and that they would be so now.

This paper is a study of but one portion of Aristophanes' campaign, that against Euripides, as expressed in one play,

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5 Werner Jaeger, Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture, New York, 1939, 373.

the Frogs. We shall consider the nature of that campaign and the attitude that brought it into being in some detail and then procede to examine its worth as a piece of persuasive writing for dramatic presentation. We shall dwell on this portion of our study at some length, considering the effectiveness of the presentation both from a theoretical and an historical standpoint.

A difficulty occurs because of the actual failure of the appeal among Aristophanes' contemporaries. From a theoretical standpoint the appeal against Euripides should have been a success since it includes sufficient rational and emotional incentive to move an audience to accept Aristophanes' view on the subject and the presentation of these persuasive factors is apparently most effective. Yet a very real problem is at hand since historians of the period, who base their opinion on ancient documents, state that the appeal was, as far as all appreciable effects are concerned, a total failure. An attempt to reconcile the findings of the theoretical investigation with those of the classical historians concludes the thesis.

The value of the two investigations, theoretical and historical, and of the attempted reconciliation is, quite clearly, that it tends to emphasize Aristophanes' ability as an artist in the sphere of human motivation while it brings into our understanding of his genius the certain evidence of its limitations.

No work of human genius is perfect and it is well that classicists, some of whom are accustomed to praise the authors of antiquity without reserve, come to realize this quite evident fact.

We shall attempt, therefore, to bring to light the truth of the matter insofar as this is possible under present limitations of time and material on the point in question. It is the hope of the author that the approach used in this study, that of communicative values, may suggest an aspect of worth in classical writers other than Aristophanes which others in the requisite enthusiasm, experience, and erudition might further develop.

The very small beginning here made, in treating but one aspect of a great classical author, Aristophanes, would seem to justify further serious research at the proper time and place.

CHAPTER II

ARISTOPHANES' ATTITUDE TOWARD EURIPIDES

Aristophanes was born about 450 B.C.[1] in the midst of the Age of Pericles, at a time when the Athenian Empire had just been formed out of the Delian Confederacy.[2] His youth was spent during that period when Greece had attained the height of its classical glory. He lived in a world that was dominated by Athenian ideals and ruled by Athenian political supremacy.

By the time Aristophanes had attained his fifth year an interlude of comparative quiet had begun with the Thirty Years' Peace between Athens and Sparta[3] and men were turning their minds away from the thoughts of war to the arts under the leadership of Pericles. It was an era of keen public appreciation of the drama but there were influences at work to which Aristophanes was to take exception.

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1 Gilbert Murray, Aristophanes, A Study, New York, 1933, 264.

2 George W. Botsford, A History of Greece, London, 1910, 359.

3 Ibid.

The cultural advantages of the times were by no means lost on the young Aristophanes. The fact that he was able to produce his own play, the Daitales, before he had attained his twentieth year and that it merited public honor[4] argues no mean understanding of the stage and all it involves on his part. That this early play was directed against certain influences which he considered injurious to culture[5] indicates to some extent the wealth of his learning as well as the depth of his convictions even as a youth. He felt that all was not right and set out without delay to do something about it. Young as he was he became not a mere theorist but a man of action.

In 426 at the Dionysia he produced another play, the Babylonians, an attack on a man who typified all that he hated in the sphere of politics.[6] And it became clear to Cleon that he had no mean adversary to contend with in the person of the novice playwright.

Three years later, again at the Dionysia, his pointed invectives were hurled at the Sophists in the person of Socrates.[7]

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4 Murray, A Study, 264.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

Aristophanes' campaign had been extended into the province of philosophy and the full import of his purpose was becoming a little clearer. He did not intend primarily to persecute individuals,[8] nor merely to purge one or other phase of human activity of incidental vices.[9] His assaults were directed against a more fundamental, a more pernicious adversary, one that permeated every aspect of Athenian life and threatened the destruction of all he believed essential to the great traditions that his generation had inherited from the past.

The solid conservatism of his convictions[10] produced two seemingly divergent effects in the character of Aristophanes. It made him a man of vehement antipathies and a humorist. Without doubt his hatreds were keen and unequivocal[11] but insofar as they were directed against abuses in philosophy, in government, or in literature there is much in them that seems justifiable.

In one sense Aristophanes' attacks were focused on in-

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8 Philip W. Harsh, Handbook of Classical Drama, Stanford, 1944, 226.

9 Jaeger, Paideia, 373.

10 Louis E. Lord, Aristophanes, His Plays and Influence, Boston, 1928, 66.

11 Harsh, Handbook, 226.

dividual persons whom he caricatured to the delight of his audience, but their lasting and universal appeal suggests a hatred that transcends the individual, making of him but a type.[12] It was, then, an intellectually deep and for that reason intense and sustained type of hatred that stimulated him in his attacks.

Aristophanes was a humorist with a purpose. He drew his characters against the background of his conservatism, making them appear in a most ridiculous light. Quite clearly he realized that humor is a most effective vehicle for the transmission of a philosophy of life.[13] He would use his satirical bent as a tool to bring people to their senses. His comedy would have a noble educative substratum embedded deeply underneath every quip and every bit of wit.[14] Humor would be the handmaiden of a seriousness of purpose that would shake Athens from its slumbers.[15] His conviction of the noble educational mission of comedy accounts for "the unique and predominate position unanimously given to him by the tradition which preserved his works alone, and a relatively

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12 Harsh, Handbook, 266.

13 W. W. Merry, Aristophanes, Oxford, 1887, 39.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid., 33.

large number of them."[16]

It is the function of cultural learning and therefore of tragedy, which is a manifestation of learning, to transmit traditions to subsequent generations, according to Aristophanes' way of thinking.[17] Accordingly it is not surprising that he should direct his attention to the innovator Euripides in the Thesmophoriazusae, the Frogs, and probably also in the lost Phoenissae. Aristophanes was convinced that Euripides was exercizing an influence that was subversive of religion and morality both public and private, that he was promoting a rationalistic spirit that would inevitably lead to dissension, that he was debasing public art.[18]

> When Aristophanes defended tragedy against Socrates and the intellectuals, he had Euripides as an enemy at his back. It was through Euripides that the new movement had invaded high poetry. Therefore the central point of Aristophanes' fight to preserve the old cultural ideals was his defense of the old spirit of tragedy, and he showed the same uncompromising obstinacy in it as in his attack on the new education.[19]

Because Euripides was destroying that "old spirit of tragedy" with its high moral tone, its portrayal of noble charac-

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17 Merry, Aristophanes, 43.

18 W. C. Green, The Frogs of Aristophanes, Cambridge, England, 1897, xvii-xviii.

19 Jaeger, Paideia, 373-374.

ters, and its fear of offending the gods Aristophanes conceived a deep hatred of him and desired to put his works in as unfavorable a light as possible.[20] To this end he directed every literary and logical device he could muster.

The moral part of his criticism is the most important in his own mind.[21] Though he is generally considered quite immoral in his own plays, Aristophanes does not hesitate to point out glaring moral deficiencies in the works of his contemporaries and to condemn them outright as injurious to the common good. He takes exception to Euripides' exhibition of illicit love affairs and his psychological studies of passion in particular.[22]

The effect of literature on public morals is certainly a factor to be considered in its artistic evaluation.[23] Art is not true to life when it depicts the ugly in an attractive way.[24] Aristophanes had a point and he pressed it insistantly.

Aristophanes also regarded Euripides as a dangerous in-

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20 Merry, Aristophanes, 11.

21 Croiset, Political Parties, 151.

22 Marsh, Handbook, 303.

23 Gilbert Norwood, Greek Comedy, London, 1931, 260.

24 Brother Azarias, Phases of Thought and Criticism, Cambridge, Mass., 1898, 248-249.

novator in the sphere of philosophy.[25] He detested the dramatist's disturbing and apparently destructive intellectual curiosity.[26] He felt that such restless and pretentious intellectualism was, at bottom, incapable of finding satisfaction, that it undermines moral discipline and gives free scope to egotistical instincts which fret at social restraints.[27] No wonder, then, that he engaged in such a violent campaign to stifle the dissemination of such a disruptive tendency.

These are his two main objections against Euripides: propagation of a doctrine that leads to wholesale uncertainties, and suggestive scenes. Both of these are regarded as matters of principle where there is no room for compromise.[28] All other criticism, whether indicative of keen insight into the nobility of tragedy or merely humorous ridicule, has as its object the ousting of the man who has sinned on these two counts from the tragic stage and his thorough discrediting in the minds of his audience.

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25 W. Lucas Collins, Aristophanes, Philadelphia, n.d., 125.

26 Marsh, Handbook, 256.

27 Croiset, Political Parties, 152.

28 Merry, Aristophanes, 11.

Even a cursory reading of Aristophanes' plays will produce the conviction that his hatred of Euripides is most intense.[29] He misses no opportunity to ridicule the tragedy writer the mere mention of whose name seems to have been to him an unfailing source of inspired wit.[30]

Aristophanes' deep learning and his profound love of Aeschylus, whom he regards as the direct antithesis of Euripides,[31] were key factors in his attitude. He loved Aeschylus because the first of the great tragedians put men of valor and courage before the public eye for imitation.[32] He abhorred Euripides because he played on the baser emotions. He loved Aeschylus for his simplicity; he detested the rhetorical sophistication of Euripides.[33] Almost every point of his criticism of Euripides finds its converse true in Aeschylus.

The list of minor charges directed against Euripides in various plays is quite formidable. His prologues are monoto-

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29 Collins, Aristophanes, 15.

30 Rogers, Aristophanes, 53.

31 Lord, Plays and Influence, 66.

32 Croiset, Political Parties, 150-151.

33 Lord, Plays and Influence, 66.

nous,[34] his characters are not differentiated,[35] his style is prosaic and base.[36] He is a Sophist and a maker of beggars, reducing tragedy to the level of the commonplace, a hater of women and an unpatriotic boor.[37] He is a sceptic, a rationalist, an atheist, a libertine, and a general corruptor of the people.[38] Many of these counts are formidable enough in themselves but when they are couched in Aristophanes' fierce invective and fortified by examples from the dramatist's own writings, they indicate a hatred that is more than passing.

The question, of course, occurs as to whether the emotional element in Aristophanes' hatred completely obliterates his sense of fairness. It seems that this is not the case generally speaking. Even though there are those who censure Aristophanes for his attack on Euripides we find in their writings the forced admission that many of the criticisms were quite fair. An example in point is the following confusing statement from Louis E. Lord: "While he is not fair to Euripides as an individual the stric-

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34 Harsh, Handbook, 305, regarding Frogs, 1202-1203.

35 Lord, Plays and Influence, 79, Frogs, 844.

36 Harsh, Handbook, 304, Frogs, 1367.

37 Harsh, Handbook, 305, Frogs, 842, 1044, 1061.

38 Merry, Aristophanes, 15, Frogs, 1069.

tures which he makes on his plays are often justified. A careful analysis . . . leaves the student with greater confidence in the justice of Aristophanes' indictments."[39]

Another opinion states that "Aristophanes probably hit the truth exactly both in a moral and a political point of view."[40] It seems that this is also true of his literary-moral criticism of Euripides as will be pointed out further on in this study.

We may say for the present that the presence of some element of restraint in his Euripidean critique seems to indicate that there was little of the irrational in his hatred. His was a vehement emotion to be sure but it was founded on a careful examination of the works of Euripides and the principles moral, philosophical, and literary implied in them.

In summation of the thoughts presented thus far we see the character of Aristophanes, formed in the classical traditions of the Age of Pericles and ardently enamoured of them, reacting against whatever he considered dangerous innovations in the various spheres of human endeavor because of the evident harm they

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39 Plays and Influence, 67-68.

40 Merry, Aristophanes, 6.

were causing to the general public. He would oppose the disquiet and restlessness of rationalism with a spirit of conservatism which vigorously adhered to those cultural traditions which had already made Athens indomitable in war and preeminent in the noble pursuits of peace.

This conservatism made him a man of vehement antipathies for he could not brook the undermining influences of the opposite opinion. It also made him a humorist because he felt that humor was a most effective tool in the undoing of the enemy's work.

His hatred focused itself quite naturally on Euripides since the latter was in his estimation untrue to moral and cultural traditions and more in particular because he used the theater as a vehicle for his heterodox views. Euripides was the propagator of fundamental uncertainties and moral degradation. Aristophanes would use every means at his disposal, every argumentative and persuasive technique, to dispose of this very formidable adversary.

CHAPTER III

THE ATTEMPT TO COMMUNICATE THIS ATTITUDE IN THE FROGS

After the consideration of Aristophanes' general background and attitude in the first two chapters, his indictments against the rationalists and Euripides in particular are clear. It remains necessary to examine the means Aristophanes used to convey to his audience the two main charges against Euripides, immorality and literary insufficiency. We shall deal with the latter first.

Aristotle has defined tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude. . . ."[1] In somewhat the same vein Aristophanes attacks his adversary when he satirizes on the trivial incidents "around which Euripides was accustomed to throw the grace and dignity of tragic diction."[2] A case in point is a lyrical monologue appearing in the Frogs in which the critic mimics the style and uses the very words of his foe. The subject is a poor spinning girl who,

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1 Aristotle, Poetics, VI, 2.

2 Rogers, Aristophanes, 420-421.

wakes to find that Glycc, a neighbor, has stolen her cock.

There is some weight to Aristophanes' argument. He is at one with Aristotle in his insistence that tragedy must be "an imitation of an action that is neither γελοία ludicrous nor φαύλη morally trivial."[3] His objection hits Euripides on important ground in a matter that refers to the very essence of tragic action. The triviality of the incident is further emphasized by the nobility of the expressions used to convey it to the audience:

Ὦ Νυκτὸς κελαινοφαὴς
ὄρφνα, τίνα μοι
δύστανον ὄνειρον
πέμπεις ἐξαφανοῦς,
Ἄϊδα πρόπολον,
ψυχὰν ἄψυχον ἔχοντα
μελαίνας Νυκτὸς παῖδα,
φρικώδη δεινὰν ὄψιν,
μελανονεκυείμενον,
φόνια δερκόμενον
μεγάλους ὄνυχας ἔχοντα.

O darkly-light mysterious Night,
What may this vision mean,
Sent from the world unseen,
With baleful omens rife;
A thing of lifeless life,
A child of sable night,

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3 S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, 4th, ---, 1951, 24.

A ghastly curdling sight,
In black funereal veils,
With murder, murder in its eyes
And great enormous nails?
Light ye the lanterns, my maidens,
and dipping your jugs in the stream
Draw me the dew of the water,
and heat it to boiling and steam;
So will I wash me away the ill effects
of my dream.[4]

The content of the dream turns out in subsequent lines to be the theft of the cook. Aristophanes was making a very definite bid against the dramatic poet. The argument of triviality of matter is recalled to the mind of the audience at various intervals during the play by the use of such epithets as πτωχοποιός "beggar-maker" and ῥακιοσυρραπτάδη "rag-stitcher."[5] It is apparent that such expressions represent a careful attempt on the part of Aristophanes to communicate this key idea. He felt, no doubt, that their implication would not be lost to an audience that was well acquainted with the tragic form.

The dignity of the tragic art demands that the action depicted be, according to Butcher's interpretation of Aristotle's σπουδαίας "grave and great."[6] It is but a short step

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4 Frogs, 1330-1340, tr. B. Rogers, Aristophanes, 421.

5 Frogs, 842, Other expressions of like character 846, 849, 850, 1053.

6 Butcher, Theory, 241, on Aristotle, Poetics, VI, 2.

from this doctrine to the demand that the manner of expression used by the tragedian be such as befits the action. Hence Aristophanes held that novelty of expression was singularly out of place on the dramatic stage and does not hesitate to call Euripides to task for expressions occuring in his Menalippe and Hippolytus: αἰθέρα Διὸς δωμάτιον "Air, Zeus' Chamber," χρόνου πόδα "Time's foot."[7] φρένα μεν οὐκ ἐθελουσαν ὀμοσαι καθ'ἱερων, γλῶτταν δ'ἐπιορκήσαν ἰδίᾳ τῆς φρενός. "'Twas not my mind that swore: my tongue committed a little perjury on its own account."[8]

The traditional sentiment of Greece made a further demand on the tragic poet. It required that he depict the action of his choice in meter that would fit the mood of the scene portrayed.[9] Deeply conscious of this tradition and the many times Euripides has violated it, Aristophanes hurls the charge of metrical insufficiency at his contemporary no less than twenty times.

His most repeated charge is that of monotony[10] which certainly would not have occurred were the meter subordinated in

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7 Frogs, 100, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 305.

8 Frogs, 101-102, tr. Ibid., 307.

9 Butcher, Theory, 148.

10 Frogs, 1208, 1211, 1217, 1225.

all cases to the meaning of the passages cited. The sources of his criticism include Iphigenia in Tauris, Hypsipyle, Sthenobia, Meleager. As will be seen from the two following examples he uses a bit of humorous repetition to fortify his indictment:

Αἴγυπτος, ὡς ὁ πλεῖστος ἔσπαρται λόγος,
Εὺν παισὶ πεντήκοντα ναυτίλῳ πλάτῃ
Ἄργος κατασχὼν. . . .
ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν.

Aegyptus, sailing with his fifty sons,
As ancient legends mostly tell the tale,
Touching at Argos. . . .
lost his bottle of oil.[11]

Σιδώνιόν ποτ'ἄστυ Κάδμος ἐκλιπὼν
Ἀγήνορος παῖς. . . .
ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν.

Once Cadmus, quitting the Sidonian town,
Agenor's offspring. . . .
lost his bottle of oil.[12]

Aside from the charge of monotony there are other metrical deficiencies, according to Aristophanes, in the work of Euripides.[13] The nature of these deficiencies is not wholly clear to scholars.[14] Aristophanes however certainly considered them "as

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11 Frogs, 1205, 1206, 1207, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 409.

12 Frogs, 1225-1226, tr. Ibid., 411.

13 Frogs, 1309-1322.

14 Rogers, Aristophanes, 418.

corrupting the simplicity of the ancient meters by the introduction of affected novelties and dainty little devices."[15] An example of this type of criticism provides ample material for our speculation as regards the more specific charges under this heading. Aristophanes had every right to expect the audience, which was all too well acquainted with Euripides, to understand them fully.

ἁλκυόνες, αἱ παρ'ἀενάοις θαλάσ-
σης κύμασι στωμύλλετε,
τέγγουσαι νοτίοις πτερῶν
ῥανίσι χρόα δροσιζόμεναι.

αἳ θ'ὑπωρόφιοι κατα γωνίας
εἰειειειειειλίσσετε δακτύλοις φάλαγγες
ἱστόνα πηνίσματα.

κερκίδος ἀοιδοῦ μελέτας.

ἵν' ὁ φίλαυλος ἔπαλλε δελ-
φις πρῴαις κυανεμβόλοις.

μαντεῖα καὶ σταδίους.

οἰανθας γάνος ἀμπέλου,
βότρυος ἕλικα παυσίπονον

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15 Ibid.

Halcyons, who by the ever-rippling
Waves of the sea are babbling,
Dowing your plumes with the drops that fall
From wings in the salt-spray dabbling.

Spiders, ever with twir-r-r-r-r-rling fingers
Weaving the warp and the woof,
Little, brittle, network, fretwork,
Under the coigns of the roof.

The minstrel shuttle's care.

Where in the front of the dark-prowed ships
Lightly the flute-loving dolphin skips.

Races here and oracles there.

And the joy of the young vines smiling,
And the tendril of grapes, care-beguiling.[16]

From an analysis of the meters involved in this passage, I would venture to state as a personal opinion that the specific objections of Aristophanes would run somewhat as follows: 1) Euripides changes arsis to thesis arbitrarily in the same line. 2) There is no metric parallel where one would expect to find it e.g. between the first and second verses. 3) The series of ε,'s is definitely out of place in the work of a tragic poet. 4) The glyconic line[17] begins with an anapest when anything but an anapest should have been used according to more acceptable tragic style.[18]

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16 Frogs, 1309-1322, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 419.

17 Rogers, Aristophanes, 419.

18 Lucian Muller, Greek and Roman Versification, tr. Samuel B. Platner, Boston, 1892, 64.

At any rate the passage seems to represent a studied attempt to communicate very definite charges against the free and arbitrary verse of Euripides to an audience sufficiently experienced to appreciate them.

But all of Aristophanes' criticism is not to be taken at face value. The weighing of the lines, for example, is clearly a matter introduced for comic effect. It is to be noted, however, that this comic effect is an intrinsic part of Aristophanes attempt to communicate his own very serious attitude towards Euripides to his audience. It is a matter of popular appeal and a carrying out of Euripides own passion for scientifically wrought expression[19] to an absurd conclusion. The fact that Aeschylus is able to conquer him in a field where he thought he had no equal is a suasive argument for the latter's general superiority over the technically minded Euripides.

One citation is indicative of the "popular" (and illogical) treatment accorded the poet in this section of the criticism. Aristophanes would have his audience believe that Euripides deserves every bit of it.

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19 Frogs, 939-947.

Διονύσος· ἴθι νῦν παρίστασθον παρὰ τὼ πλάστιγγ',
Αἴσχυλος καὶ Εὐρίπιδης· ἰδού.
Δι· καὶ λαβομένω τὸ ῥῆμ' ἑκάτερος εἶπατον. . .
τοῦπος νῦν λέγετον εἰς τὸν σταθμόν.
Ευ· εἴθ' ὤφελ' Ἀργοῦς μὴ διαπτάσθαι σκάφος.
Αι· Σπερχειὲ ποταμὲ βουνόμοι τ' ἐπιστροφαί.
Δι· κόκκυ, μεθεῖτε· καὶ πολὺ γε κατωτέρω
χωρεῖ τὸ τοῦδε.
Ευ· καὶ τί ποτ' ἐστὶ παῖτιον;
Δι· ὅτι εἰσέθηκε πόταμον, ἐριοπωλικῶς
ὑγροι ποιήσας τοῦτος ὥσπερ τἄρια
σὺ δ' εἰσέθηκας τοῦπος ἐπτερώμενον.

Dionysus: (to Aeschylus and Euripides): Each of you stand beside his scale.

Aeschylus and Euripides: We're here.
Di: And grasp it firmly while ye speak your lines
. . . .Now speak your lines into the scale.
Eu: O that the Argo had not winged her way--
Aes: River Spercheius, Cattle-grazing haunts--
Di: Cuckoo! Let go. O look, by far the lowest
His scale sinks down.
Eu: Why, how come that about?
Di: He threw in a river, like some wool seller
Wetting his wool, to make it weigh the more.
But you threw in a light and winged word.[20]

There is a good deal of plain bickering in the play. At one point while prologues are under discussion Euripides cites the first line of his Antigone: ἦν Οἰδίπους τὸ πρῶτον εὐδαίμων ἀνήρ "A happy man was Oedipus at first"[21] and Aeschylus breaks in to say that this could not have been so since Oedipus was destined

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20 Frogs, 1370-1388, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 425.

21 Frogs, 1182, tr. Ibid., 407.

to be his father's murderer even before he was born.[22] Euripides counters with the second line: εἶτ' ἐγένετ'αὖθις ἀθλιώτατος βροτῶν. "Then he became the wretchedest of men."[23] The value of the argument as it stands in the text is nil but the audience would doubtless be amused and Euripides was getting a dose of his own sophistic reasoning because of the lack of distinction in the term, εὐδαίμων "happy." The point of the jibe could hardly be lost to an audience already well-acquainted with the dubious logic of the tragedian.

A more serious charge is that of a sentimentality which is hardly in accord with the nobility of tragedy.[24] It is brought forth beginning at line 1062 and a discussion of its practical effects on the wealthy follows immediately. It will reduce them to "tatters and rags" with "wooly vests" hidden beneath their less attractive exterior garments. This apparently means that they will assume a shameless hypocritical attitude, if we are to judge from the context.

These are but a few of the literary indictments voiced against the very emotional Euripides. But they are typical and

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22 Frogs, 1183-1186.

23 Frogs, 1187, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 407.

24 Will Durant, The Life of Greece, New York, 1939, 412.

they give us a sufficient view of Aristophanes' line of assault against the poet as tragedian.

The text is filled with inmuendos which are subtle perhaps to the modern scholar but obvious enough to the patron of the Greek theater. Aristophanes is not loath to use such devices for they serve his purpose better in a sense than more studied intellectual criticism. Their quick, pointed humor hits his adversary at his most vulnerable points and is very effective precisely because it is immune to logical refutation. Two examples suffice to indicate the nature of such devices in the Frogs. In the first a generally unsatisfactory play written by Euripides, the Telephus, is hurled full in his face:

> ἵνα μὴ κεφαλαίῳ τὸν κρόταφόν σου ῥήματι
> θενὼν ὑπ' ὀργης ἐκχέῃ τὸν Τήλεφον.
>
> Lest with some heady word he crack your skull
> And batter out your brain--less Telephus.[25]

A pun lies in the replacement of the word Τήλεφον for the expected ἐγκέφαλον.[26] The audience laughs and Aristophanes had put Euripides in a most ridiculous light.

In the second such device the critic wishes to create

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25 Frogs, 854-855, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 375.

26 Rogers, Aristophanes, 395.

an impression that is slightly different. Previously he maintained that Euripides was a poor dramatist. He now indicates that the tragedian does not understand the relatively simple rules for proper enunciation or, at least, that he has neglected to train his actors to speak their lines intelligently. In his Orestes we hear the following:

ἐκ κυμάτων γὰρ αὖθις αὖ γαλῆν. . .ὁρῶ.

Out of the storm there comes a fine new--cat.[27]

When the absence of the pause before the last word would have produced:

ἐκ κυμάτων γὰρ αὖθις αὖ γαλήν' ὁρῶ.

Out of the storm there comes fine new weather.

The audience laughs again, possibly recalling to mind other insufficiencies of the same type. The jibe, harmless enough in itself, contributes little to Aristophanes' thesis against Euripides but its suggestiveness is apparent and the critic realizes that human nature often responds to innuendo where more formal argument would be ineffective.

Such charges, it may be argued, are of little value even as pieces of suggestion. Perhaps this is so but it cannot be denied that, if there are enough of them and they are combined

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27 Frogs, 303, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 325.

with censures the worth of which is without question, an audience may well be expected to accept them. Without doubt this is precisely what Aristophanes had in mind.

Careful study will disclose that the charge of moral corruption permeates almost every significant dramatic arraignment in the Frogs. But the converse is not true, for there are many instances in which the accusation of immorality appears without any direct reference to its artistic implications. Immorality, primarily that type of immorality which is opposed to purity of life, is, from the author's viewpoint, the most serious and the most formidable accusation in the play.[28]

The attempt to communicate the full import of this charge to the audience is, accordingly, without any restraint. It seems as if the vehemence of the critic on this point can hardly confine itself to the spoken word. Perhaps it may be explained by a reform in Aristophanes' own life as a playwright, however temporary, and a desire to undo some of the harm he had done in this sphere. Whatever the case, the criticism is at hand in the Frogs and it is most bitter.

Reference to specific plays of Euripides abound and

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28 Harsh, Handbook, 303.

the evils following upon improper scenes are dilated upon. The attack is broadened to include all forms of sentimentalism because of their weakening influence on manly valor. Aristophanes clearly realizes that his enemy is not really as much of a rationalist trying to bring truth to light as he would make out. He is also an emotionalist as a result of the weakened principles induced by his rationalism. Any offensive against his rationalistic dramatic novelties would be incomplete without a corresponding onslaught on the level of spineless emotionalism.

The virile Aeschylus upraids him:

ὦ Κρητικὰς μὲν συλλέγων μονῳδίας
γάμους δ' ἀνοσίους εἰσφέρων εἰς τὴν τέχνην.

Thou picker-up of Cretan monodies
Foisting thy tales of incest on the stage.[29]

As far as we are able to discern Κρητικαὶ μονωδίαι refer to love-sick monologues which the tragedian had undoubtedly composed and introduced into his lost Kretes and Kresai. These plays deal with the misplaced love of Aerope and Pasiphae.[30]

In a later section of the Frogs the critic elucidates his charge against the evil scenes depicted by his dramatic confrere:

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29 Frogs, 849-850, Rogers, tr, Aristophanes, 375.

30 Rogers, Aristophanes, 374-375.

Αισ. Ποίων δὲ κακῶν οὐκ αἴτιος ἐστ';
οὐ προαγωγοὺς κατέδειξ' οὗτος,
καὶ τικτούσας ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς,
καὶ μιγνωμένας ποῖσιν ἀδελφοῖς,
καὶ φασκούσας οὐ ζῆν τὸ ζῆν;

Aes: Of what ills is he not the creator and cause?
Consider the scandalous scenes that he draws
His bawds, and his panders, his women who
Give birth in the sacredest shrine,
Whilst others with brothers are wedded. . . ,
and others opine
That "not to be living" is truly "to live."[31]

Aeschylus cites his whole dramatic career in contrast to this disgusting business: ἀλλ' οὐ Φαίδρας ἐποίουν πόρνας οὐδε Σθενεβοιας. **"But Phaedras and Stheneboeas? No harlotry business deformed my plays."[32]**

The audience is not excused for its contemptible delight in scenes such as these. In an effort to arouse disgust for its response to such scenes Aristophanes, using a device of the time, personifies the audience in the character Dionysus. This dramatic manikin typifies crowd reaction throughout the course of the play and its use enables Aristophanes to make very pointed though indirect comments on the failings of his own audience. Dionysus' effeminate longings for the plays of Euripides is depicted in an

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31 Frogs, 1078-1082, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 399.

32 Frogs, 1043, tr. Ibid., 395.

early line:

Δι· καὶ δῆτ' ἐπὶ τῆς νεὼς αναγιγνώσκοντί μοι
τὴν Ἀνδρομέδαν πρὸς ἐμαυτὸν ἐξαίφνης πόθος
τὴν καρδίαν ἐπάταξε. . .
Εὐριπίδου.

Di: There as on deck I am reading to myself
The Andromeda, a sudden pang of longing
Shoots through my heart . . .
for Euripides.[33]

The hideous unnaturalness of the longing is emphasized by the intervention of a series of less questionable though unedifying objects of possible desire where the omission occurs in the above citation. The fact that Aristophanes could make such a charge is a sad commentary on the morals of the day. The fact that he could put his point across without incurring the wrath of the mob at Athens is a tribute to his ingenuity. This is effective criticism at its best.

Towards the end of the play Aristophanes inserts another such critical device which is worthy of note here. In a parody of a line from Euripides' Aeolus he characterizes the lack of objective moral standards among the people. The line in the Aeolus reads:

τί δ'αἰσχρον, ἢν μὴ τοῖσι χρωμένοις δοκῇ;

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33 Frogs, 52-53, 67, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 301-303.

What's wrong if they who do it think it not so?[34]

And the imitation in the Frogs:

τί δ' αἰσχρον, ἢν μὴ τοῖς θεωμένοις δοκῇ;

What's shameful if the audience think it not so?[35]

Not only does the parody put across a moral point, it also exemplifies in a striking way the charge that he has been reiterating in a more abstract way throughout the Frogs: Euripides is a corruptor of public morals. It is not too much to expect that people who have been reciting the verses of Euripides from memory for years will appreciate this implication.

The positive harm that Euripides has already done is clear from these lines. Aristophanes feels, no doubt, that a clear and concise statement of the evil is necessary if it is to be combated effectively. It is to be noted that he does not place himself directly in opposition to the audience in these lines but is content to let Dionysus speak for them. They may draw their own conclusions.

Thus far we have considered Aristophanes' attempt to communicate his attitude from the standpoint of topic matter,

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34 Aeolus, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 432.

35 Frogs, 1475, tr. Ibid., 433.

literary and moral, citing various indictments separately. Were we to stop here we would certainly miss much of the genius of the man as regards the total effect he was striving to produce. Accordingly it is necessary to study a part, at least, of his treatment in globo. That part is the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides which occupies the second half of the play. We choose this part of the play, of course, because most of the serious matter is there contained. What goes before is largely preparatory.

Dionysus and his servant Xanthias have, after an adventurous journey, come to the realm of Hades in search of the recently deceased Euripides.[36] They are surprised to find a great disturbance taking place.[37] Euripides has made claim to the "tragic chair where Aeschylus was seated"[38] with the aid of "thieves, burglars, and parricides"[39] whom he has won over by his "twists and turns and pleas and counterpleas."[40]

Aristophanes makes a strongbid for the attention of the audience and their eventual repudiation of Euripides as the liter-

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36 Frogs, 66-67.

37 Ibid., 757-758.

38 Ibid., 776-777, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 369.

39 Frogs, 772, tr. Ibid., 367.

40 Frogs, 774-775, tr. Ibid.

ary struggle for superiority between him and Aeschylus begins. He sets the two in violent opposition knowing full well the delight his fellow citizens will take in the use of pointed epithet:

Ευ· ἐγῷδα τοῦτον καὶ διέσκεμμαι πάλαι
ἄνθρωπον ἀγριποίον, αὐθαδόστομον
ἔχοντ' ἀχάλινον ἀκρατὲς ἀπύλωτον στόμα,
ἀπεριλάλητον, κομποφακελορρήμονα.

Eu: I know the man; I've scanned him through and through.
A savage-creating, stubborn-pulling fellow
Uncurbed, unfettered, uncontrolled of speech
Unperiphrastic, bombastiloquent. . . .[41]

The casual reference to Euripides' scientific attitude in the word διέσκεμμαι is to be noticed. The epithet ἀγριποίον indicates Aeschylus' tendency to draw his plays from "the more primitive and wild strata of Greek Legend, as in the Prometheus and Suppliants. The titles and fragments of the lost plays show the same tendency even more strongly."[42] We do not have space to enter into a discussion of the other epithets. Their function is obviously to give an air of objectivity to the contest as they constitute a genuine criticism of Aeschylus. It will be noted, though, that the points mentioned do not touch the essence of tragedy as previously defined.

Aeschylus is also given his chance at ad hominem in-

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41 Frogs, 836-839, tr. Ibid., 373.

42 Gilbert Murray, The Frogs, London, 1908, 121.

vective:

Αι ς· ὦ στωμυλισσυλλεκτάδη καὶ ῥακιοσυρραπτάδη,
καὶ πτωχοποιέ. . .
οὐ δῆτα, πρίν γ'ἂν τοῦτον ἀποφήνω σαφῶς
τὸν χωλοποιόν, οἷος ὢν θρασύνεται.

Aes: Child of the garden queen,
Thou chattery-babble-collector,
Pauper-creating rags and patches stitcher. . . .
I'll not (be still) till I've made you see the sort
of man
This cripple-maker is who crows so loudly.[43]

The epither in the first line, of course, refers to Euripides' mother, Cleito. It was a well established theatrical joke to refer to her by this title. Murray suggests that possibly the poet himself was a vegetarian.[44] The other allusions seem to fortify Aristophanes' claim that Euripides had brought tragedy down to the level of the commonplace. His argument does not seem to be that there is anything to be despised in the commonplace as such but that the definition of tragedy excludes uninspiring things from its ken.

The critic dabs in a bit of humor as the scene progresses. Aeschylus, so long dead, laments that Euripides has the advantage since his poetry, which died with him, is here in Hades

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43 Frogs, 840-842, 845-846, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 373.

44 Murray, Frogs, 122.

ready to be quoted.[45]

Aristophanes takes care to alienate Euripides from the traditional gods:

Ευ· αἰθηρ, ἐμὸν βόσκημα, καὶ γλώττης στρόφιγξ,
καὶ ξύνεσι καὶ μυκτῆρες ὀσφραντήριοι,
ὀρθῶς μ' ἐλέγχειν ὧν ἂν ἅπτωμαι λόγων

Eu: Ether, my pasture, volubly rolling tongue,
Intelligent wit and critic nostrils keen,
O well and neatly may I trounce his plays.[46]

Euripides prays to empty air in comic symbolism of his empty poetry. A lack of soundness in his subject matter and his treatment seems to be implied though the commentators do not mention the point. Aeschylus prays in a more noble strain:

Αισ· Δήμητερ ἡ θρέψασα τὴν ἐμὴν φρένα,
εἶναί με τῶν σῶν ἄξιον μυστηρίων.

Aes: Demeter, mistress, nourisher of my soul,
O make me worthy of thy mystic rites.[47]

His is the traditional theology and the elevating purpose of dramatic perfection for religious reasons.

With this the contest proper begins. Euripides inaugurates his offensive by attacking Aeschylus for the dramatic silence of his lead while the chorus is permitted to set the

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45 Frogs, 868-869.

46 Ibid., 892-894, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 377.

47 Frogs, 886-887, tr. Ibid.

scene,[48] and for the use of great-sounding words which are not clear in meaning.

Euripides plumes himself on many counts. He has toned down words and expressions to make them understandable to the common man. He had introduced much chatter from books. He has had the assistance of his servant, Cephisophon, a man of undoubted talents, whose monodies excel anything Aeschylus has been able to produce. He is not prone to use haphazard words nor does he plunge abruptly into the story. He brought the scenes of common life to the stage and taught rationalism and sensual love. He introduced canons of verse and witty expressions.[49]

The charges against Aeschylus and the defense put forth by Euripides would sound formidable enough on the surface. But it is well to note that all the counts against Aeschylus in this part of the play are quite superficial and capable of easy refutation. The points which Euripides urges in his own favor are, again, injurious to the nature of tragedy and simply meaningless as arguments for his superiority. The monodies, if we are to admit their excellence as pieces of poetry considered apart from tragedy, are not totally his own work. Yet, Euripides is permit-

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48 Frogs, 911-913.

49 Ibid., 923-959.

ted to state his defense with some degree of fairness on the part of Aristophanes,[50] who intends to be as objective as the nature of his purpose will permit. We shall indicate a possible conclusion as to the extent of that fairness later in the thesis.

Aeschylus then counters with the proposal of a general question asking his adversary why he thinks a poet should be acclaimed great. Euripides answers:

> δεξιότητος καὶ νουθεσίας, ὅτι βελτίους τε ποιοῦμεν
> τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν.
>
> For his ready wit, and his counsels sage,
> And because the folk he trains
> To be better citizens and worthier men.[51]

With Euripides' answer the entire discussion is put on a practical, moral basis rather than on one that is strictly aesthetical.

It is not that Aeschylus is inferior to Euripides as a poet. The structural integrity of his plays, the natural flow of their dramatic action, the participation of his choruses in the action are among the reasons for his superiority on this score.[52] Aristophanes, rather, shifts the argument from literary to moral

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50 Botsford, History, 411-412.

51 Frogs, 1009-1011, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 391.

52 Botsford, History, 412. Euripides surpasses Aeschylus as a dramatist on the single score of character delineation.

grounds because he wishes to dwell on the question of influence on the public mentality for good or ill. This is, he feels, an area in which the goodness or badness of a poet should be most clear even to the "groundlings" of his audience.

Given Euripides' agreement to the norm for judging a worthy poet, Aeschylus proceeds with the apology for his poetry. He takes care first to point out:

> τοῦτ' οὖν εἰ μὴ πεποίηκας ἀλλ' ἐκ χρηστῶν καὶ
> γενναίων μοχθηροτάτους ἀπέδειξας,
> τί παθεῖν φήσεις ἄξιος εἶναι;
>
> You have done the reverse; found noble-hearted and virtuous men
> And altered each and all for the worse.
> Pray, what is the meed you deserve to get?[53]

On the other hand I (Aeschylus) have placed the high ideals of rigorous manhood before the citizens of Athens in Seven Against Thebes. I composed the Persians in an attempt to make people long for military victory against their country's foe.[54]

All of my works have from the very first wrought good. Specifically, Orpheus taught you religious rites, to stay your hand from murder. Musaeus taught you healing; Hesiod taught you agriculture. Valor, honor, right, the glory of battle were given their due place. I did not teach sensual love for this is to be

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53 Frogs, 1010-1012, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 391.

54 Frogs, 1021-1027, tr. Ibid., 391-393.

untrue to the art of poetry and the good of the country. I have provided my audiences instead with noble persons and noble deeds to imitate and I have clothed these in noble words.[55]

On the contrary you (Euripides) have made constant debating the ambition in all the state and reduced action to nil. The people do not have noble loves to fight for. Your sophistries, your rationalistic spirit have been taken up by public officials who delude the people. Physical courage is lost and worthy women, shocked by your lustful scenes, are taking to hemlock.[56]

There are many other elements in the contest, some of which had already been referred to before we treated the contest in particular. But those elements immediately above give a sufficient picture of Aristophanes' total attempt to communicate to the audience his personal feelings regarding Euripides. The heaping of charge upon charge on the part of each of the contestants is an effective way of bringing out to contrasts between the two. The whole study is objective enough, although there is no mistaking that Euripides has been effectively disposed of. The total effect of the criticism would surely do what no single

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55 Frogs, 1030-1058.

56 Ibid., 1069-1088.

part of it could accomplish alone.

In an earlier play, the Clouds, Aristophanes made the mistake of an appeal that was directed towards the more intellectually inclined in his audience.[57] His failure to attain the objective he had in mind on that occasion taught him a lesson. That he learned this lesson well is all too obvious from the emotional devices he utilizes along with his more reasoned attack in the present work. He permits each of the contestants to shower his adversary with abuse. He effectively employs the device of contrast throughout the play and especially in the second half, setting the sickly emotionalism of Euripides and its effects on public morals against the rock-solid, manly virtue of Aeschylus. No one can miss the full import of such studied contrast!

In summation of this chapter then, we see that according to Aristophanes, Euripides' work is not genuine tragedy at all because of the triviality that permeates its every aspect: subject-matter, word usage, meter. Subject matter is sentimental; word usage is too scientific; meter is repetitious and suggestive of an attitude that is not in accord with the solemnity of the tragic stage.

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57 Murray, A Study, 118.

What is of even greater significance is the lack of moral restraint in the plays of Euripides. The evil is particularly evident because of the effect the plays are having on public conduct. Moreover, his rationalism is taking away all of the principles upon which the Greeks have built their culture and their morality. It is one thing to do such an injustice to the country; it is another more serious crime to do it within the sacred confines of the theater!

CHAPTER IV

THE NORMAL HUMAN RESPONSE TO THIS APPEAL

Comedy has a purpose.[1] What is ridiculous or comic is so precisely because of a comparison, whether explicit or implicit, with what is serious and according to the normal course of human existence.[2] The very ability to perceive the ridiculous argues intelligence, and intelligence suggests, at least, that comic incongruity be subordinated to a purpose higher than itself.

The purpose of comedy corresponds with that of humorous satire insofar as both are directed toward the correction of manners and customs in a pleasant way.[3] Both are necessarily involved with the art of persuasion and are bound by its laws. The comic artist, therefore, must first and foremost be a student of human nature if he is to achieve the serious end he has in view.

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1 Joseph Kleutgen, S.J., Ars Dicendi, Rome, 1902, 247. The pertinent passage is worth quoting: "Finis comoediae est: delectando mores corrigere: id quod maxime consequitur ridiculo."

2 Elisabeth Woodbridge, The Drama: Its Law and Technique, Boston, 1898, 58.

3 Kleutgen, Ars, 247.

That Aristophanes' comedy, the Frogs, has a serious purpose has already been established. The nature of that purpose and the means he used to achieve it are clear from the previous three chapters. The question now remains, was that means effective? Prescinding, for the moment, from the actual effects immediately following upon his attempt to discredit Euripides, we shall examine pertinent sections of the text in an effort to discover their persuasive value.

There is a current dispute in classical circles regarding the persuasive value of the works of Aristophanes. The difficulty seems to arise from a keen appreciation of his critical work on the part of modern scholars[4] and their inference from personal appreciation to the conclusion that the criticism was equally effective among the poet's contemporaries. Professor H. Lloyd Stow of the University of Oklahoma sums up the difficulty:

> Because of the modern appreciation of the high rank of Aristophanes as a political and social dramatist . . . there has been a resultant wide-spread belief that he also exerted a potent influence in the daily life and opinions of the Athenians of his own time. This belief has been fostered by two very logical considerations:
>
> The inherent reaction of the modern reader to the plays of Aristophanes: It is difficult for anyone to conceive today that these plays . . . could have been presented at the greatest festival of the year, before practically the entire citizen body of the

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4 H. Lloyd Stow, "Aristophanes' Influence Upon Public Opinion," The Classical Journal, XXXVIII, Nov. 1942, 83-84.

> Attic state, and not have a great influence upon the spectators, bringing ridicule and disgrace upon the person mentioned.
>
> The belief is also cultivated by the impression caused by Aristophanes' own statements concerning his power and influence. The modern reader is very much inclined to accept Aristophanes at his own estimate of himself.
>
> This rather general belief, however, has not gone unchallenged. . . . At least two writers have made definite statements concerning this point. Both Gilbert Norwood and J. W. White state emphatically that Aristophanes was not able to harm the individuals whom he attacked.[5]

In other words one school of thought, realizing the merits of Aristophanes' persuasive technique and taking other factors into consideration, would without further examination conclude to the actual historical effectiveness of his plays. The other, looking more to historical fact, cannot bring itself to such an assumption.

Persuasion has been defined as "the art of moving to action by means of entreaty, reason, or emotional appeal."[6] It follows that there are three factors in the process of persuasion: intellect, which perceives truth, emotion which results from the perception of some sensible good or evil, and will which

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5 Stow, Influence, 83-84, citing Norwood, Comedy, 25-26, and White in his introduction to Croiset, Political Parties, xiii.

6 J. Berg Esenwein, How To Attract and Hold an Audience, New York, 1902, 28.

chooses to act or not in accord with the data presented by intellectual and sense perception.

In the opinion of this writer the main appeal against Euripides in the Frogs is definitely to the intelligence of the audience. This is not to deny that this essential appeal is fortified by strong emotional devices. It merely asserts that the intellectual case as presented rests on its own merits and that it is sufficiently convincing to persuade any thinking individual that something ought to be done about this rogue, Euripides.

Let us consider the case as presented. The thesis of the play might be stated as follows: Euripides is a poor tragedian and a perverter of the people.

He is a poor tragedian because he misconstrues the very meaning of tragedy in centering its grace and dignity around trivial, uninspiring, and improper subjects. Moreover he uses novel expressions that are inconsistent with tragic effect and he does not subordinate his meter to the subject matter. He is sentimental to the detriment of the tragic spirit. His preoccupation with subtleties makes him lose sight of the whole function of the dramatist.

He is a perverter of the people because he depicts im-

pure scenes which are of their very nature calculated to the detriment of morals, public and private, and contribute to the breakdown of family life[7] and because he encourages a rationalistic outlook which is destroying the certitudes upon which national courage rests. It does not matter that his intention is good; the means he uses to attain his goal are not effective. They are even harmful. Aristophanes is at variance with Euripides' finis operis, not his finis operantis.

These are the arguments divorced from all their emotional elements. They are without doubt quite convincing. They are not so highly technical that only a few will appreciate their value. Every mature citizen at Athens understands something of the nature of tragedy and is well acquainted with the plays of Euripides. These things were as well known to the Athenian of 405 B. C. as the major league standings are to the average American of our own day.

The evil effects of immoral plays and of unbridled rationalism are equally apparent once they are pointed out. Aristophanes indicates these very clearly and contrasts them with the effects of Aeschylus' plays. In doing so he makes his intellectual attack complete.[8] He has brought it down from the level of

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7 Frogs, 1051.

8 Esenwein, Audience, 36, discusses such contrast.

an abstraction to the plane of personal significance. He has done all he can to arouse individual hatred against so great an evil.

Yet human beings are moved, as a rule, more by emotion than by reason alone. The intellectual argument must be fortified by as many clever emotional devices as possible if it is to be effective.[9] Granted the soundness of the arguments there can be no harm, Aristophanes feels, in taking people as they are and utilizing emotional appeal to the full. He will fight fire with fire.

To this end he plays on the still lingering enthusiasm of his audience for the traditional art forms, personifying them in the sober and stolid Aeschylus and exemplifying them from his plays. He depicts Euripides as a chattering fool and a sensuous, unstable, and proud corruptor of classical traditions. He chides him for his dubious logic[10] and "batters out his brain--less Telephus" for the derision of all.

He is fierce in his criticism of "incestuous unions"[11]

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9 Ibid., 29.

10 See this thesis, 29.

11 Frogs, 830.

depicted by the poet and he dilates on his "love-sick" monologues.[12] He takes care to alienate Euripides from the traditional Demeter and he detests the suicidal tendencies of some of his characters for their effect on impressionable minds. He associates him with "thief and parricide"[13] in Hades and he permits the ordinarily restrained Aeschylus to hurl torrents of scholarly abuse at him.[14]

Humorous ridicule is a most effective tool in the trained hands of the skilled critic for it makes use of the power of indirect suggestion. Suggestion seeks the acceptance of a proposition without logical consideration of its merits.[15] It is a particularly potent weapon when there is question of mass motivation because of the transfer of emotion from one member of a group to another.

Aristophanes makes continued use of this device, for example in his many passing references to sections from Euripides' plays. Part of his audience, recognizing the truth of an indictment based on a passage from a particular play, will easily

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12 Frogs, 829.

13 Frogs, 773.

14 Ibid., 840-842.

15 Robert T. Oliver, The Psychology of Persuasive Speech, New York, 1945, 229.

pass on that recognition in the free and unrestrained interchange of impressions during the course of the play. Eventually all will come to accept it enthusiastically.

Throughout the Frogs Aristophanes shows himself a master in the art of selecting those items from the plays of Euripides which will contribute to the end he has in view. He has often been accused of being unfair for this very reason. It is quite true that Euripides made some worthy contributions to the drama and that Aristophanes overlooks these. But nowhere does he explicitly deny them. If he is bound to introduce them the attack on very real dramatic and moral evils which far outweigh the good Euripides has done will suffer irreparable damage.

Whatever the opinion of subsequent generations on the point, Aristophanes feels he cannot pass a favorable judgment on such features. It is a tribute to his knowledge of the laws of persuasion (if not to his fairness as a scholar) that he chooses to overlook them.

Sufficient explanation has been given of the intellectual and emotional factors at work in the Frogs. It remains to be seen just what effect one might expect them to have on the normally receptive individual. Just how will he probably respond to the arguments as proposed? It goes without saying that we are treading on difficult ground in dealing with the subject of res-

ponse on the part of the human will to the persuasions of the play. We do so only in the hope that some further light may be shed on its merits.

The arguments and emotional stimuli presented in the Frogs form a sufficient basis for the communication of Aristophanes' personal convictions regarding Euripides to the audience and for their permanent retention of a deeply-rooted hatred of the tragic poet. They do so because they are sound and because they are joined to an emotional appeal which is well calculated to fortify them in the mind and heart of the audience. To view the question from its psychological aspect, the intellectual and emotional appeals are directed towards a single well-defined goal: the hatred of Euripides' plays and all that they stand for. Such an orientation of motives is, from a theoretical standpoint, infallibly effective. The psychologist Lindworsky is insistent with regard to the doctrine of a unifying objective in motivational appeals. He says in part: "The most important element in any act of the will is the laying down of an aim or goal; this element is far more important in the assumption of a deliberate and considered general attitude."[16]

The application to the play is quite clear. Aristo-

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16 Johann Lindworsky, S.J., The Psychology of Asceticism, tr. Emil A. Heiring, London, 1950, 8.

phanes has set before himself and his audience such a single, well-defined goal. He intends a thorough and systematic discrediting of Euripides. His selection of means throughout the play is directed by this single purpose. This is his reason for not dwelling on any real merits Euripides might have as a tragedian. He cannot call into play any intellectual or emotional factors that might distract the audience from his purpose. This too is his reason for bringing Euripides into sharp opposition with Aeschylus. The faults of the one will be clear and certain in contrast with the merits of the other. This is his reason for the emotional outbursts of the two. This is the key to the play!

When there is question of the permanence of a communicated attitude, sound psychology insists that thought-content in the appeal is its surest and almost infallible guarantee.[17] Aristophanes did not intend merely to influence the people of Athens for an hour or a day; that would be no great psychological feat. He wished them to retain the impression they had received on that festival day at Athens for the rest of their lives and his work supplies an intellectual basis that is capable of bring-

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17 Johann Lindworsky, S.J., The Training of The Will, tr. A. Steiner and E. A. Fitzpatrick, Milwaukee, 1929, 71. The metaphysical basis for Lindworsky's doctrine is ultimately found in Aristotle, Physics, II, 3, 5.

ing that about.

That Aristophanes was keenly aware of the absolute necessity of audience appreciation of his intellectual arguments there can be no doubt. He very cleverly refers to this specific point in a chorus during the contest between Aeschylus and Euripides:

εἰ δὲ τοῦτο καταφοβεῖσθον, μή τις ἀμαθία προσῇ
τοῖς θεωμένοισιν, ὡς τὰ λεπτὰ μὴ γνῶναι λεγόντοιν,
μηδὲν ὀρρωδεῖτε τοῦθ'· ὡς οὐκ ἔθ'ὕτω ταῦτ' ἔχει.
ἐστρατευμένοι γὰρ εἰσι,
βιβλίον τ'ἔχων ἕκαστος μανθάνει τὰ δεχιά.
αἱ φύσεις τ'ἄλλως κράτισται,
νῦν δὲ καὶ παρηκόνηνται. μηδὲν οὖν δείσητον, ἀλλὰ
πάντ' ἐπέξιτον, θεατῶν γ'οὕνεχ',
ὡς ὄντων σοφῶν.

Fear ye this, that today's spectators
Lack the knowledge they need for taking
lack the grace of artistic lore
All the points ye will soon be making.
Fear it not: the alarm is groundless:
that, be sure is the case no more.
All have fought the campaign ere this:
Each a book of the words is holding:
never a single point they'll miss.
Bright their natures, and now, I ween,
Newly whetted, and sharp, and keen.
Dread not any defect of wit,
Battle away without misgiving,
Sure that the audience, at least, are fit.[18]

It appears from the selection that Aristophanes wishes to rest his case on reason and that he wants the audience to appreciate this fact. Can there be any serious doubt that he rea-

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18 Frogs, 1109-1118, tr. Rogers, Aristophanes, 401-403.

lized the intimate connection between the permanent ousting of Euripides from the tragic stage and the audience's appreciation of logical rather than purely emotional motives for the attainment of this goal?

We shall study the immediate historical reaction to the play in a later chapter. The theory presented here as to its effectiveness is better borne out by the appreciation shown this criticism and others like it by subsequent generations of scholars and classical enthusiasts by its wholehearted and permanent acceptance on the part of Aristophanes' contemporaries.

The ninth book of the Palatine Anthology contains among its epigrams an inscription by Antipater of Thessalonica that is indicative of the influence of Aristophanes during the Augustan age and the high repute in which he was held:

> Βίβλοι Ἀριστοφάνευς, θεῖος πόνος, αἷσιν Ἀχαρνεὺς
> κισσὸς ἐπὶ χλοερὴν πουλὺς ἔσεισε κόμην.
> ἠνίδ' ὅσον Διόνυσον ἔχει σελίς, οἷα δὲ μῦθοι
> ἠχευσιν, φοβερῶν πληθόμενοι χαρίτων.
> ὦ καὶ θυμὸν ἄριστε, καὶ Ἑλλάδος ἤθεσιν ἶσα,
> κωμικέ, καὶ στύξας ἄξια καὶ γελάσας.
>
> These are the volumes of Aristophanes, a divine work, over which the ivy of Acharnae shook in profusion its green locks. Look how the pages are steeped in Dionysus, how deep-voiced are the dramas full of terrible grace. O comic poet, high of heart, and worthy interpreter of the spirit of Hellas, hating what

deserved hate, and mocking where mockery was due!"[19]

But favorable judgments are by no means limited to ancient times. Louis E. Lord in his Aristophanes, His Plays and Influence makes the remark that while "there is hardly a trace of his (Aristotle's) influence in the older Euripidean scholia . . . Aristophanes' criticisms are familiar ground and his standards of criticism are adopted."[20] And this despite the fact that the early scholars who wrote on the plays of Aristophanes might well be expected to have Aristotle's very profound treatise, On The Theory of Poetry at their fingertips.[21]

Professor Lord also refers to Aristophanes' criticism as "the first great and influential document in literary criticism" constituting one of his claims to immortality.[22] He is in substantial agreement with many other scholars both ancient and modern.

Maurice Croiset in his Hellenic Civilization epitomizes Aristophanes' general influence as a critic in the following

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19 W. R. Paton, The Greek Anthology, 2nd, London, 1925, III, 96-97.

20 Lord, Plays and Influence, 88.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 61.

words "On the whole, we may say, the comedies were well-calculated to awaken reflection and the spirit of criticism."[23] Of course he is speaking of the nature of the works as such in precision from the question of their immediate effectiveness with the people at Athens.

Testimony such as the above bears out the theoretical analysis of the motivational elements in the criticism of Euripides. It is particularly revealing as proof of the intellectual basis of the whole critical appeal.

Thus we see the general effectiveness of Aristophanes' attack both from a theoretical and from an historical standpoint in the case of ages other than his own. Yet, it must be admitted that this is but a partial picture of his influence. We must proceed to the further question of his influence in his own times. The Frogs and its indictment of Euripides was written to motivate a particular group, and its success or its failure may be measured, in one sense, from its attainment or its failure to attain this very particular objective.

What, then, of its effect on Aristophanes' contemporaries? How did the people for whom he intended the criticism

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23 Maurice Croiset, Hellenic Civilization, New York, 1925, 110.

respond to his attitude: To what extent did they agree with him? These are questions proper to the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

THE HISTORICAL RESPONSE TO THE PLAY

Having examined the attitude of Aristophanes towards Euripides, its expression in the Frogs, and the reaction one would be inclined to expect from such a persuasive presentation of opinion, we proceed now to the questions asked at the end of the last chapter. We are concerned first with the nature of the response. Because an adequate presentation of this historical fact entails knowledge of its causes, we shall consider some of the influences at work among the people which tended to frustrate the end Aristophanes has in view in making his appeal.

Though there is still some dispute on the point it is widely accepted among classical scholars and historians of the Age of Pericles that Aristophanes wielded little influence in the practical affairs, whether civil or theatrical, of his country.[1] It seems as though his plays were liked and even admired within the confines of the theater but that their conservative and

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1 Muller-Strubing, Aristophanes und die historische Kritik, - -, n.d. cited in Stow, Influence, 87.

moderate philosophy of life was put aside as soon as people turned from his plays to the business of everday existence. This should not be considered strange in an age that was turning from faith in the simple ideas and ideals of the past to rationalism and its dangerous quest for certitudes that were at the time never to be found.

Gilbert Norwood and J. W. White, whom we have previously cited on this point, agree that Aristophanes' many very carefully worked out attempts to persuade the people of Athens of dangers inherent in rationalism, whether of a philosophical, a political, or a literary character, were met often with no success to speak of.

Professor H. Lloyd Stow would go so far as to assert that the poet's influence was universally negligible. He says in part:

> It seems impossible to point out a single individual, political party, or theory, which was harmed or even seriously menaced by the attacks of Aristophanes. Ofttimes the poet was no doubt a nuisance to certain prominent individuals, but he could not turn the majority against them. He frequently reflected the view of a section of his audience and that of the general public, but there is no proof that he influenced any large number of his audience or readers who were not already so inclined.[2]

Professor Stow claims that even in the case of the attack against

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2 Stow, Influence, 92.

the Sophists Aristophanes' apparent partial success was due far more to the already prevalent popular disesteem of Socrates than to any effort on the poet's part.[3] Aristophanes' attack against Cleon, on the other hand, was thoroughly frustrated by the latter's popularity when the Knights was presented just four short months after the political demagogue's conquest of Sphacteria.[4]

It is particularly noteworthy that a subsidiary appeal in the play we have studied, and not the main appeal against Euripides, was the cause of public honor for Aristophanes. The people were very much impressed by his request in the parabasis that those citizens who were disenfranchised and exiled because of participation in the oligarchic revolution of the Four Hundred be readmitted to citizenship and allowed to return home from banishment.[5]

Aristophanes was awarded first prize at the festival not because of his wit or because of his attack against Euripides but because he had given the city patriotic advice.[6] For the same reason he was presented with a wreath of wild olive from

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3 Ibid., 91.

4 Ibid., 86.

5 Ibid., 91.

6 Rogers, Aristophanes, 293.

Athena's sacred olive tree after a command performance of the play a few days later.[7]

Yet for all this celebration, history records that the people set aside his proposal of readmittance, the precise reason for honoring him, and went their respective ways until circumstances forced them to grant the one-time revolutionaries the rights of citizenship once more after the slaughter at Aegispotomi. It was the practical consideration of impending doom that threatened the city and not the worthy appeal of the poet that forced them into effective action.[8]

> On that day the author of the Frogs was vindicated. He had not possessed sufficient influence to force his passionate and thoughtless fellow citizens into useful activity at the opportune moment, but he did have the merit of discovering what was right and of saying it frankly and in beautiful words.[9]

If this very curious treatment of the man and his work, this approval and rejection, is indicative of anything it clearly demonstrates Aristophanes' lack of effective influence with regard to the goal he had in view. This seems all the more true for, although the appeal for the reinstatement of the former citizens actually caused some stir among the people, the main

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7 Lord, Plays and Influence, 73-74.

8 Stow, Influence, 91.

9 Croiset, Political Parties, 163.

object of the play seems to have had no appreciable effect whatever.

> In spite of Aristophanes, he [the Greek citizen of ordinary talents] and his educated friends were all reading the splendid tragedies of Euripides, with their uncertainties, struggles, and doubts about life and the gods.[10]

The beginnings of an adequate reason for Aristophanes' lack of influence in his campaign against Euripides may be found in the great diversities existing among the many who witnessed his play, the Frogs. It was, indeed, a hodge-podge of humanity. All citizens, whether they were able to pay the price of admission or not, were admitted. The state would supply the necessary two obols for the indigent.[11] Everyone came to the comedies except women with some self-respect. Artisans and tradesfolk put aside their tools and wares for the day. Merchant-seamen left their rigging behind at the Piraeus and farmers turned away from the soil.[12] The Lenaea was a state occasion and no one able to go would think of missing it.

It is not surprising that such a gathering would take crude delight in the coarsest vulgarities.[13] It was, even as

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10 James A. Breasted, The Conquest of Civilization, New York, 1938, 163.

11 Durant, Life, 381.

12 C. E. Robinson, Zito Hellas, London, 1946, 104.

13 Ibid.

large groups go, without the slightest reticence in these matters. Very emotional in its outlook, it loved the emotional Euripides for he appealed to its passions, its pity, its sense of remorse, and its lust as no other poet.[14]

This same audience was becoming increasingly aware of its own power in public matters. Conscious of its power it became more fickle at the theater. Often enough in disgust with a play it had driven the actors from the stage by means of hurled missles, fruit and vegetables and even rocks. Its hatred when stimulated to the proper degree could even rise to murder, as Aeschines could testify.[15] But its approval for the moment could be most sweet.

The case in point of Aristophanes' Frogs is a good example of its fickleness. Such a gathering would be little troubled about any contradiction between its approval of the parabasis and its failure to take effective steps to respond in a practical way to the appeal in the parabasis. The main objective was, after all, enjoyment and escape from the monotonous toil of everyday life when one attended a play. The deeper, hidden significance within a play, whether of Aristophanes or Euripides. . . .

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14 Breasted, Conquest, 396.

15 Durant, Life, 381.

What did that matter? "The Play's The Thing!"[16]

There is no point in denying that this audience for all its crude behavior was, in its own way, highly intellectual. It had a keen appreciation of the drama and found delight in the wit and invective of the critic because it was able to understand the meaning behind such wit. Yet, for the very reason of its mental acuteness it was a prey to prejudices in favor of the new learning. Its very intellectuality was an ally to its emotional attachment to the pseudo-humanism of Euripides. The logic and hatred of an Aristophanes, potent though they are to unbiased minds, were powerless to stem the tide of the quest for what is new and daring.[17]

When the Frogs was produced at Athens the influence of Euripides was particularly strong among the young.[18] And it must be remarked that "the majority of citizens, while ready enough to laugh at Aristophanes' satire, must have found Euripides novel and interesting."[19] This was true even though they certainly may not

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16 Hamlet, II, ii, 591. The Tragedy of Hamlet, ed. Ebenezer Black, Boston, 1909, 101.

17 Lord, Plays and Influence, 77-78.

18 R. B. Appleton, Euripides the Idealist, London, 1927, 35.

19 T. A. Sinclair, A History of Classical Greek Literature, London, 1949, 263.

have given their entire approval to his doctrine. The mere fact of Aristophanes' attack indicates that public opinion regarding the tragedian had been far too favorable in his personal estimate of the situation.

Beyond the points which Aristophanes directly mentions there were many elements in the works of Euripides which attracted the love of the ordinary Athenian citizen. Aristophanes had criticized him for his immorality and his unjustified elevation of the commonplace to tragic heights. But there were doubtless those among the people who felt great sympathy for his depiction of the ordinary feelings of mankind: sound sentiment (not sentimentality), characters that are human in the fullest sense, a longing to find out the truth about the gods while preserving personal religious esteem for the divine, the power of noble love, the spirit of repentance for wrongs once committed, and an esteem for standards of morality which are eternal and universal.[20]

These elements are undoubtedly found in the plays of Euripides and they seem to indicate a noble intention on his part. But it must be noted (and this thesis would seem to be in opposition to Mr. Appleton's book quoted immediately above) that these same plays are directly and primarily directed toward peo-

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20 R. B. Appleton, Idealist, 109, 162, 76-77, 82.

ple with exceptionally high ideals and exceptional intellectual endowments, as Mr. Appleton himself admits.[21] As a consequence we must assert that any real good that they might do would be limited by the very nature of the plays to those few whose leisure and intellectual capacity might cause them to look beyond the improprieties of certain scenes, which Aristophanes deplores, to a more hidden meaning.

The less noble and more obvious interpretation of the plays with its evil effects on morality, courage, and religion was what he had in view in his attack. It was such an interpretation that gripped the heart and the imagination of the common man and colored his thoughts.

The whole tenor of the Frogs lies subordinated to this attack. The play is utterly meaningless without such a unifying theme; it becomes an artful masterpiece in its own right as well as a keen piece of critical writing once this purpose is supposed. Aristophanes knew what he was after but his attempt came too late. The love of the people had already been won by the less noble aspects of the tragedian's work.

There was another influence at work among the people

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21 Ibid., 74.

who witnessed this masterpiece of critical insight, and it is deserving of closer study here if we are fully to understand the difficulties that faced Aristophanes in his attempt to oust Euripides from the tragic stage.

At the time when the Frogs was presented the Sophists had a grasp that was growing quite firm on the younger members of the audience.[22] Their schooling, spasmodic though it was at this time, had brought the individual to a deep consciousness of his personal importance.[23] And the effects were being felt in public life and attitudes even of the older generation.

While they professed to educate youth to a love of excellence the Sophists meant by this term not virtue and morality but practical efficiency.[24] This is not to say that their influence was wholly baneful or their intentions perverted. They did much good in training youth in rhetoric, jurisprudence, history, and literary studies.[25] But it is evident that their attempts to philosophize were leading to much confusion of thought among the citizenry. Instead of stabilizing conduct on a firm

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22 Laistner, History, 442.

23 Ibid., 443.

24 Ibid., 442.

25 Ibid., 447.

rational basis they were undermining all standards of behavior to the detriment of the civic life they professed to serve.[26]

It is not strange then that the powerful influence they were exerting should frustrate the attempt at reform which Aristophanes inaugurated against their literary ally. Because of their influence men's minds were in that state of confusion which precedes agnosticism and their passions were dominant in the sphere of personal choice. The cold, clear logic of an Aristophanes would be viewed as relative and not absolute and the emotions to which he appealed, love of tradition and hatred of base and sentimental fancies, would avail little against the fires which Euripides had enkindled in hearts which were dry-moored in the sands on the desert of sophistic speculation.

And so the Frogs must be looked upon as a complete and unequivocal failure if we are to judge it in view of its author's espoused purpose. In fact Aristophanes' whole campaign against rationalism and emotionalism, of which this play is but a part, failed miserably. The emotions, the pre-convictions, the fickleness of the people, coupled with the influence exerted by Euripides himself and by the Sophists, had grown into an impregnable

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26 Jaeger, Paideia, 369.

barrier to the light of reason and the love of the past. And Athens fell from the glory it was never to see again a few short months after the presentation of the play.

It was a dubious triumph for Euripides and the Sophists.

CHAPTER VI

RECONCILIATION OF THE DIFFERENCES

The marked contrast between the historical effect following upon Aristophanes' Frogs and the theoretical effect discussed at length in Chapter IV suggests a number of further points for our consideration here. We have already indicated some of the influences that served to frustrate the critical writer's very well-planned attempt to discredit his contemporary's plays. But these influences, strong as they were and capable of causing failure to such an attempt, do not seem to be the whole explanation of the actual failure.

We are now interested in the complete reconciliation of the historical and the theoretical effect as far as this is possible. Some of the points already mentioned must bear further investigation if our understanding of their importance is to be adequate. And beyond this aspect of the problem influences within the play itself which may have weakened the appeal against Euripides must be studied and brought into relation to our subject, communicative values, if we are to find a satisfactory answer to the problem.

The extraneous influences aside, there are such undermining factors within the play itself. This is not to say that the appeal against Euripides is not well-designed to produce the effect obviously intended by the writer as we have already pointed out. It means, rather, that the intended effect may itself have been defective in some way and that factors within the play extrinsic to the attack in question may have contributed something to its historical ineffectiveness.

The effect intended by the author was undoubtedly a communication of his own personal hatred for Euripides and all that Euripides had preached, for example in the Bacchae, just a year before the Frogs was first presented. That he intended this effect, the communication of hatred, can easily be substantiated from the fourth chapter of this thesis. That he offered the audience a sound basis not only for hatred but for a permanent hatred is clear from the intellectual part of his appeal which stands on its own merits. Reason and reason alone is in the natural order a secure foundation for the permanence of an attitude. Thus there seems to be no essential flaw in the relation between the means he used and the effect he intended.

If there is, indeed, a defect, it appears that it is in the effect intended. This effect is, of its very nature, an attitude of mind on the part of the audience. It is asking a great deal of people who are constantly distracted by the ordinary

cares of life and, in the present instance, taken up with the scepticism of the rationalists and the emotionalism of the bard of the commonplace, that they should persevere in their adherence to a doctrine which militates against their emotions. No matter how clear their perception of the truth which Aristophanes was trying to put forth, that perception must necessarily grow dim with the passage of time according to ordinary psychological laws, while their reading of the works of Euripides would keep his sentimentality and his immorality ever before them.

Perhaps, if Aristophanes could have dared to suggest that the works of Euripides be burned or some other means be taken to obliterate his influence, he would have achieved his ultimate goal. But such a course of action, besides requiring that the obliteration take place while the people are in a white heat of anger (for it could not otherwise be achieved) is generally unthinkable. And so, the appeal of the critic was foredoomed to failure for its lack of a practical program to do away with Euripidean influences.

Another weakening influence on the main appeal in the Frogs is the introduction of two other pleas. Unlike the matter studied in the foregoing paragraphs, the introduction of these recommendations is not, of itself, frustrating to the main appeal. But when we consider that these appeals drew considerable attent-

ion to themselves because of their connection with the civic and religious feelings of the audience, it becomes evident that their influence cannot but have been devastating to the main objective in view.

The first of these requests asks that the Elusinian Mysteries be restored and rehabilitated;[1] the second, that political harmony be established and a general amnesty be granted to those citizens who were exiled after the fall of the Four Hundred.[2] It will be remembered that the second appeal, in fact, was largely responsible for the second presentation of the play a few days after its premier performance and for other unusual honors to the author. The entreaty for the restoration of the Elusinian Mysteries was well in accord with the religious sentiments of the audience and, in a sense, symbolic of peace since the procession connected with these rites could only be conducted when there was no question of attack.[3]

Hence it follows that both of these appeals must have attracted considerable attention to themselves and caused a corresponding lack of emphasis in audience appreciation of the main

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1 Frogs, 372-459.

2 Sinclair, History, 310.

3 Ibid., 308.

point of the play.

Aside from these very fundamental considerations for Aristophanes' lack of influence, two other factors merit passing notice. Throughout his career as a playwright Aristophanes did not follow his own moral judgment against Euripides.[4] The reason for this may very well be that he wishes in instances where he falls short of the mark himself to attract the attention of his audience and gain their favor to use it as a means to some other end. Perhaps he merely wishes to amuse. But the fact remains that the licentiousness of his own works as a professional man could well represent a most effective barrier in the minds of his audience to the very indictment he was trying to promote against Euripides.

It has also been maintained that Aristophanes unwittingly aided in the dissemination of the opinions of Euripides.[5] This probably means that his attack on the tragedian served itself in some way as a vehicle for his acquittal. The representation of certain evils with the intention that they be corrected may certainly have the exact opposite effect especially when one is dealing with the masses. Whatever the case, the mere fact

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4 Durant, Life, 429.

5 Botsford, History, 223.

as presented would work as a factor that might be decisive against his loose motivational appeal. The lack of a clear-cut distinction between what is in itself a reason against an evil and what will appear to an audience as a reason against evil is fatal. Ontological reasons are not always subjectively impressive of worth.

Enough has been said about influence on the part of the play and its author subversive to the end he had in view. It is now necessary to introduce a few more thoughts on the question of audience attitude. It will be remembered that we mentioned their emotional and intellectual tendencies and particularly the influence of Euripides and the Sophists among them as factors which even the genius of an Aristophanes could not overcome.

The multiplication of other difficulties from the audience standpoint made the permanent and effective communication of Aristophanes' attitude well-nigh impossible. The cultural trends set in progress by Aeschylus and Sophocles were dying out; conservatism and private belief and the noble ideals of theatrical portrayal were beginning to suffer at the hands of the miserable successors of the great dramatists. The tragedian Meletus, the dythyrambist Cinesias and the comedian Sannyrion were coming into vogue.[6] And there was increasing love for Euripides himself

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6 Jaeger, Paideia, 373.

whose verse cast a powerful spell over the common man.[7] His death had only accentuated his influence. Everywhere his plays were being read and the humanism he preached was enjoying a popularity unknown because of the ascendency of rationalism among the people.

The lowering of public tastes could hardly be expected to have aided Aristophanes' argument. Moreover the increasing tensions peculiar to the period before the downfall of Athens and the ending of the Peloponnesian war may well have created in the minds of some a distraction from the more subtle dangers within the Euripidean plays. The immediacy of the crisis could not be overlooked no matter how much people desired to keep it in the background. The cultural disease from within and the enemy from without were effectively allied against Aristophanes, the man who possessed the cure, and he was not able to convince the patient of its effectiveness.

Under the four month blockade of Lysander, Athens fell a few months after the presentation of the Frogs.[8] The empire was no more! Historians mark this date as the end of the literary

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7 Murray, A Study, 134.

8 Botsford, History, 360.

and moral supremacy of Athens as well.[9] But, in sober truth, it marks only the placing of the tombstone over the corpse of a culture destroyed long since from interior causes. The height of human endeavor was never to be attained by human means alone!

That Aristophanes could not revive the dying culture in its last moments is no indictment against his greatness. It merely indicates that he labored under human limitations. The very cause for which he labored contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction; how much more the cause against which he pitted his strength! The noble traditions of the past could not satisfy men's minds and the rationalism of the present could only destroy their simple faith. It was a dilemma which, for the time, admitted no solution. No man could in and of himself supply for the deficiencies of a culture that was merely human.

There is then, no essential disparity between the historical failure and the theoretical success of the Frogs. Viewed from a strictly psychological aspect the appeal embodied within itself a stimulus that was more than sufficient to motivate. This is true despite the distractions of the two other appeals in the play and despite the effect at which the main appeal was aimed.[10]

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9 C. A. Fyffe, A History of Greece, New York, 1902, 100.

10 The appeal was aimed, it will be remembered, at hatred rather than action.

Yet the appeal did not successfully motivate because of the various factors at work in the minds of the audience which set up a barrier through which even the cleverest of human appeals and the most carefully designed persuasive devices could not penetrate to establish effective action.

If Aristophanes did not succeed where he wished, he did succeed in a greater sense in a sphere beyond his realization. He has given us in the Frogs a masterful example of persuasive technique and pointed criticism in a medium that is well suited to the communication of ideas of importance, namely purposeful comedy. It is precisely these elements, pointed criticism and persuasive technique, that along with its wit and literary merits, make his Frogs worthy of study.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **Matthew E. Creighton, S.J.** has been read and approved by three members of the Department of

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

June 25, 1953
Date

William J. Young, S.J.
Signature of Adviser